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Homicide and Suicide among the Joluo of Kenya

SUICIDE AMONG JOLUO

We have discussed the Luo attitude toward death at some length in our description of homicide. These attitudes apply equally to suicide, except that they are extended to an association of the idea of death and its concomitant link with the supernatural to self-destruction, as an assurance or determination on the part of the individual to hasten the day when supernatural forces can be made to bear on the frustrations which led up to the act of suicide. The motives for suicide are thought to be to avenge the deed by the malevolent supernatural forces which at death become allied to the dead, who are able to use them against those on earth to solve problems which they found beyond human solution.

Throughout childhood there is constant reference to suicide, and in adolescence, early marriage, and old age the threat of suicide is an effective technique used by the Joluo to achieve goals or to avoid distasteful consequences. Threats are not often put into practice because they are used only when their effectiveness is relatively assured.

Unfortunately for the student, suicides are not usually reported to the authorities, although legally they should be. Therefore, few cases are recorded as in advanced countries in the coroner's court. The Joluo believe that suicide brings *chire* to a large segment of the clan of the suicide, and it is therefore kept as quiet as possible and dealt with immediately by the clan elders and clan medicine men, *jobilo*. The family of the suicide are forced to perform cleansing rituals and ceremonies before they may again participate in the social life of the clan. Data are for these reasons hard to collect. The few cases which were brought to the attention of the authorities were only those suspected of having been cases of murder which were made to look like suicide.

During a two-year tour among the Joluo tribes of Central Nyanza, I was able to collect 220 cases from informants. Of